WORD WATER

SPECIAL TED THOMPSON NUMBER

ALL POETRY ISSUE!

Wordeater
Issue No. 111
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MOST RUN AWAY
Kevin E. Orf

Let the moon reel you in
like the pulley of the stars.
You must be elevated.

Let the Lord look down
to save your wounded soul
for He never hated.

Let the light of the world
create happiness all around.
Fall to your knees and pray.

With the trials we face,
it's so hard to cope.
Most of us run away.

Let hope return to you
in the glory of God.
Fall to your knees and pray.

Faith soon will carry you.
Don't be afraid.
Most of us run away.

WINTER'S HEART
Scott Frost

Winter's heart
has two tunes,
one gentle
one rough.

Love
like winter
has two tastes.

The object of life
is to understand both.
You can never understand
one without the other.

Each morning
is a reminder of that.
I understand the parts
but need to piece them together.

LOVE
Amber Lamb

I am the grass.
You are the sky.
We fuse under the sun.

My head is a river.
My legs become trees.
Together, they grow powerful and strong.

My heart is a storm.
My hands like hail.
I will descend and destroy what I love.

THE CHATTER OF WOMEN

Sara DePirro

The chatter of women
whispers through the
clean, wet sheets
hanging in the wind to dry.

The constant rumble of small feet
fills the background. The two women,
sipping coffee, talk of the good ol' days,
blocking out the noise around them.

The laughter of women
fills the air as they work.
Their days are filled with chores,
running children everywhere.

The constant reminder of days
when they were free to come and go,
running everywhere, making noise,
hanging in the wind to dry.

HOW ABOUT THIS?

Marissa L. Frattini

How about this?
I'll hold your heavy head while you think about
a little bit of everything a little too hard
and we'll walk around like that
with your head in my hands
you bent all funny to keep from falling over
and people will scratch their heads
and wonder about us weird kids
and the state of the world today
and we'll wonder why we didn't try this earlier,
me, feeling needed,
you, feeling a little lighter.

MODERATION
Morgan Drdak

Hmmm....
I think I want a brownie.
No, not just one.
A whole plateful of brownies.
Brownies make me lick my lips.
Mmm...the ones with little chocolate chips...
But I can't.
I'm watching my weight.
And I'm watching my back.
For, you see, moderation is key.
Only one brownie for me.
Because the dieticians, the televisions, the movie stars with their plastic little bodies, the Cosmos and my mother tell me only in moderation.
In moderation, everything is all right, right?

They say...
Have fun, live life, enjoy your time on this earth before your time runs out and the clock says TICK TOCK for the very last time.
But only...in moderation.
Don't drink too much, don't eat too much, don't talk too much, don't laugh too much, don't have too much fun because all play and no work makes Jack...
What does it make Jack?
It makes him poor, it makes him crazy, it makes him lonely, it makes him a heathen, it makes him socially unacceptable.
Jack needs to learn the value of moderation.

Have sex...
Make babies, make love, not war, have sex, safe sex, protected sex, consensual sex with those that are socially acceptable.
Those of your status, your color, your age, your race, your nation, your creation.
Have sex... in moderation.

Have faith...

Believe in God, praise Jesus, go to church, live by the word of the Lord,
be holy, be pure, repent and SAVE YOUR SOUL.
But don't bring your faith outside of church, don't bring it to school,
don't bring it to work, don't bring it to the streets.
Have faith... in moderation.

Kill...
But only when it is socially acceptable according to out laws, our mores,
our values, our views, when it suits our needs.
Kill on the battlefield, in the trenches, in the prisons, on the ruins
of the land of those others.
Be part of the machine built by the white bread white men in the white house
as they do pirouettes on the graves of those others.
The innocent, the guilty, the victims, the wives, the infants, the men,
the children, the poor.
But don't kill your own.
Kill...in moderation.

Stand up for your rights...
You have the right to free speech.
You have the right to remain silent.
You have the rights that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution,
the bills and the laws that this patriarchal society has bestowed upon you.
But the smoke from a barrel
    The thrust of a strange man
    The pierce of a needle
    The addictions, the lies, and the fear
can rip those rights right from under your feet and leave you
standing there breathless with nothing to stand on.
So stand up for your rights...in moderation.
Human rights, animal rights, the rights of every man, woman, child, fetus, sperm,
and American.
God bless America! The land of liberty, the home of the brave, the place that you
can be free...in moderation.

You know what?
Forget the brownies.
I just lost my appetite.

I AM A RAT
Steve Wichelecki

I am a rat;
my body is engrossed by a blanket of brown;
my myopic eyes are near my elongated snout;
my desiccated claws are tipped with translucent nails;
my slender tail is cold and frail.

I dwell in desolate, dark walls,
austere attics, and cadaverous corridors;
I lose myself in these places;
amidst inimical mites and insidious spiders,
amidst ancient dust and pungent, wet wood,
I scurry, like any other rat, seeking a nourishing insect to gnaw;
and, like any other rat, with my diminutive rodent mind and dirty rat world,
I have nothing much else to do with myself.

But at this moment, something exceptional occupies my attention:
feeble fingers of light, proliferated by a faulty wall, beckon me;
I slowly saunter to this aperture:
sticking my head though it, I am met with a dying, balmy day;
a somnolent sun sets in an ardent sky;
billowing stratums of red, gold, and purple lull the lethargic sun to sleep.

I peer to the east:
a fat marmalade cat vigilantly inspects the encroachment of night upon day,
its piercing green eyes slit by black crescents,
its sumptuous stripes flaunted by proud fur;
it lies upon a concrete window ledge,
one of many that adorn its large cylindrical structure,
an arabesque of red brick and vibrant green ivy;
atop this edifice sits a bone-white, fluted dome,
which, in places, assumes shades of the dying day.

PLAGUE
Dustin Podkulski

A rage-filled damnation based on ignorance and inferiority
this—the plague of America—a sadness which destroys the hearts and rots the soul of a nation,
the seeds of unbridled hatred,
this hell on Earth...Prejudice.

A nation claims to be the land of the free
yet its people repress those who are different
from black man who cannot get a job in white-controlled business world
to the Hispanic who cannot get a decent wage for work.
Why?
Because they do not have the education needed.
We fund the schools of the rich,
all things their children need for a perfect society
and as for the poor,
our hearts continually see their education level slip.
To this we answer it is their fault.

Our great nation proclaims a separation of church and state
yet our moral values will not let a loving couple of the same sex marry.
An engraved value set by a religious dictatorship
allows for a law that strips away the ideals of the land of the free.

Through all of this hell
our nation is exposed to worse pains,
ills of man which never seem to fade.
Hate Groups.
Racial Stereotypes.
Beatings of the Different.
How can we raise our children to hate those who are not like them?
Breed a society whose values dwell in hate?
We as a people need to accept others for who they are
for we are all human
and the only inferior among us is
the Bigot!

THE LOST REVOLUTIONARY: A CONFESSION

Jeff O'Malley

> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket
> no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.
>
> T.S. Eliot

I'm the lost mad son of the revolution
And revolutions like mine
Fail...but continue
Give me liberty for I am already dead
And still I feel those shackles
They never leave.

...drizzle, drazzle, drizzle (silence)
That's how it felt...
Or maybe it's was more like
Plop, plop, plop, drip, drip, !bzuoooooouthe! (silence)
It's hard to remember
Whatever it is...
When the sound goes away
There is a loss...but still a trap
Binding life to sentience,
It turns out that was wrong.

Ensnared enlarged enraged entombed
And dead...This is all I can be

Locomotion was once a child's toy
Wind me up, spring me, hurl me...
I did it all myself...

It rains on the ground
Seeps down into the ground
And the rain must find me

I'm wet, wet, wet, wet ,wet, wet...
but I only know it through deduction
And I heard a while ago when I could hear
...worms will crawl through me.
What I'd give to feel a worm crawl through me!
Dig down deep and find me, oh worms, oh precious worms
Grind my flesh, rip it to shreds, destroy and tatter my body slowly!
But let me feel it.

The rain causes holes which makes it easier for the worms, I'd imagine

Life plays itself back muddy
Still, moments, passions, loves
Moments, passions, loves...
Ahh, those are the children I've still got
Can I make out this face?
Who did it belong to?
No, it's an arm, is that an arm?
No, no, a leg! It's a leg...
How exciting! A leg!
Usually all I get are feelings...

My revolution was of my mind
A thinking man's game
Here is a confession,
It killed me,
And I killed myself.
(silence)

THE APOLOGY

Elizabeth Affrunti

You went with me
You looked for bread and nuts
Up one row and down the next
You scanned for things you liked

Then your favorite came into view
So delicious for the taste buds.
What a culinary delight
Too good to pass by

You opened the bin
And into it you reached
You savored every mouthful
As if you were entitled

The produce man caught you
And pointed out to you
The little morsels you consumed
Were stolen goods for sure.

You yelled and screamed as I looked on
Grew more indignant by the second.
You tossed coins like you were right
And swallowed the apology that could make things right.

THE REGAL
Karl Weinhold

The paint has lost its luster
and changed into faded white.
The body has dents and scratches.
Rust's set in like a blight.

The front bumper sits kind of crooked
because an accident took place.
The headlights are uneven.
One of them shines in space.

The passenger-side door
looks somewhat out of place.
The reason is
it had to be replaced.

The handle on the driver-side door
has fallen out of place
and the lining on the roof
is falling in my face.

Even though the car is worn
and looks like it came from the 'hood,
I like my Buick Regal
because it still runs good.

THE BLOSSOMING PARK
Daniel Halkyard

A delightful day to walk in the park on this day,
on such a lovely day in May
with lots of spring flowers all around
growing in the luscious green ground.

There is the sound of a gurgling stream.
Really, this day seems more like a dream!
Children play foolishly in the soft mud
while life all around continues to bud.

Young doves hatch from their nest;
worms are brought for their fest.
Care is taken by the mother dove
with lots of love.

Sad to say, the day begins to depart.
Nothing will ever hurt this little park.

GOODBYE
Jennifer Torbick

Goodbye, dearest grandfather.
I will forever cherish your memories.
I will remember the love I received
bouncing on your knee.
My Quick Bunny cocoa mug.
Hugs and kisses and hugs.
Wonderful Christmases and Thanksgivings.
My favorite relative.
Maybe even a friend.

A year ago, the world lost a wonderful, loving man.
How is it that three years ago
even right before you got sick,
you didn't seem a year older than your son,
my father, who held me when I bawled,
my father, who told me the drive was too far.
I didn't get to see you.
I didn't get to hug you.
I didn't get to tell you how much I loved you.
My father told me you know all this.
Maybe that should make me feel better.

But I didn't get to say goodbye.

WARM KNIVES
Adam Farcus

warm knives
dull my sense
everything is getting blurry
i think i'm going to be sick

now you're alone
and now you're alone
warm knives
dull my sense

my brain has melted totally
now i'm going to be
my right eye is slow
i am hollow

i am disemboweled
just warm knives
i hate myself
i wish I could cry

LIFE AND DEATH OF A CHOO-CHOO TRAIN

Zyndram Para

I am a choo-choo train.
All I feel is pain. All of you I blame.
And all of my cries are in vain.
Happy days are long gone.
Days when people loved me, I traveled near and far.
Now, I rust in rain and snow and dry in the sun.
Seldom ever used, they say I am old.
They say I am no longer "cool"—
How cruel, how cruel...
I did what I could
even more than I should
and these people would destroy me if they could.
Some do, in some ways.
Some throw rocks and others decorate me with graffiti.
What have I done to deserve this inhumane brutality?
Revenge will be mine still
and before long human blood will I spill!
It just so happens that I will drag many wagons of tourists.
I will have my revenge on them—and they do not even know this!
For the first time on the tracks in years,
soon, for my pain and grief and sorrow, many will shed tears.
On the tracks, the first time in many years—
This day will be my last.
Picking up speed, going down hill,
there is a sharp turn—I am going too fast!
I cannot make it.
I cannot even think why I should even try.
"It's a good day to die, it's a good day to die."
Full speed I do for death. I am ready.
Hatred and bloodlust overwhelm me.
A sharp turn I cannot make.
Our lives it will take.
My agony and misery will soon end—
Our lives at my hand.
To the fiery pits of hell they will go
ending my pain and sorrow.

THE WAY TO ETERNITY

Eleanor Penney-Laryea

There is a way which seems right to men
but later on leads to destruction.
The way is God's own perfect way.
For you to make the way,
obey the commandments.
You have to be prepared to fight,
give up your old behavior, and take
up your cross and follow Jesus.
First of all, you have to steep yourself
in the blood of the spotless lamb.
Then stand firm and put on the sturdy
belt of truth buckled around your waist.
You are now ready to defeat
lying tongue and lust.
Put on the breastplate of righteousness.
Then smash on hatred, murder, reveling,
jealousy, drunkenness, and orgies.
For shoes, put on the peace that comes
from the Good News.
Then you are ready to condemn
false doctrine and blasphemy.
In every battle, you need faith as your shield
to stop the fiery arrows (idolatry
and witchcraft) aimed at you by the devil.
When you think you have defeated
all your enemies and blasted their territories,
out of nowhere comes the earth's massive giant
to hinder you with doubts and failure,
but with the helmet and the sword of the Spirit,
which is the word of God,
you are able to defeat him and burn him into ashes.
Now you are ready to discover
the way to eternity.

DREAM LOVER
Erin Elizabeth Molburg

He comes in the midnight hour
showering me with a gentle lover's kiss,
wrapping warm arms around my shivering frame,
holding me close to his warm chest,
butterfly kisses caressing blushing cheeks
as large hand massage my body
taking me to heaven and back.
He soothes my pain and calms my fear
speaking quiet words of love,
his hushed voice tickling my ears.
I rest within his secure arms
feeling content and at peace.

Yet when I wake, he is gone.
His tender touch reaches me no more.
The soft caress, the sweet words
all vanish in the fading night.
My world is empty once again.
Sorrow fills my vacant eyes.
The body aches for closeness,
but no answer comes to its call,
so I sit and wait
till the sun sets and night arrives
when he returns once again
to heal my ravaged soul.

OVER CLIFFS
Anthony Masino

Over cliffs, sand falls on a dead city
in the middle of this desert made by
man's deadly instruments. Decayed buildings
show their skeletons of garter rails and
twisted steel beams. Aging concrete falls onto
a half-disintegrated car. The sound echoes
through what was formerly city blocks.
In this once dense populace lives only
an old man. His hair and beard are long
and white. His clothes are tattered and
stained with age and filth. He continually
makes equilateral triangles and right squares
in order to make perfect circles on the north wall.
On the other walls, he writes in a language
he made himself to scribe his life's story.
He creates line after line about his childhood,
about how carefree and easy life was. He goes on
in made-up words explaining the wars that raged
and how proud his mother was that her son
was going off to protect what was left of the world.
The he tells the wall about how he was a hero,
but his army failed and people scattered the world
with chaos ensuing. The earth shakes and the man
writes faster; the old man gets anxious and tense.
The crag containing the city buckles and pours sand
down in a deluge. The sand fills the crevasses and
covers the city. Sand covers the man's feet.
He has curtailed all regard for grammar and spelling
by the time the sand comes to his waist.
At the point when the flood of sand reaches his head,
he reads what he has written, but now the only words
he was able to read were "over cliffs."

DARKNESS
Pamela Lembke

Here I sit in the darkness
quiet—except for the ticking of the clock on the wall
and the sound of rain dripping through a hole in the roof.
Quiet? No! How annoying these sounds can be.

Darkness? Yes, except for the flicker of a candle I've lit.
No lights, no TV, no music.
Do I sit here by choice?
NO—power outage.
I am angered by the inconvenience.
How selfish we are.

Here I sit in the darkness
quiet—except for the ticking of the clock,
dark—except for the flicker of the candle with the sweet
smell of plums.
Oh, how peaceful this can be.

BIRTHDAY LETTER

Pat Kurz

Legendary snow on the day you were born.
Deep, white, dazzling winter jewels whipped by brutal winds.
And you in a hot hurry to emerge.

Driving, watching the mirror
Slowly through the snowy streets,
Sanctuary. Womb within womb,
Weaving carefully where people waited for us

Your emergency energized me.
Standing in the cold trying to pay the man,
You were knocking at the cellar door demanding deliverance.

I carried all this baggage with me.
The bear that replayed the sounds you ceded by birth.
A wicker basket to carry you home,
to float down a river if I needed to save you.
The first new clothes. The first everything.

Resting from your willful labor, so did I.
Your terms, your timing, your decision.
With little grace, you barged into life and erased the pain.
Together we wailed to trumpet your arrival.
Oh leader of victorious people,
live up to your name for we are a victory.

Huge and blue and red and wet,
The perfect sight,
The most amazing fight embodied in you.
And my eyes would not release you.
Your flirtatious, sleepy eyes said: "I know you."

Clueless at thirty, I thought you were mine forever,
My baby, my boy, mine, mine, mine.

Perhaps we did you right.
You live your life, pay your way, and do for yourself.
You are gifted, beautiful, strong and healthy—
all the things we want for those we love.

I miss you deep in my bones even when I see you.
I envy your friends for their time with you.
Like lovers grown apart,
I suffer knowing you will live without me.
How selfish I am with you.
What a fine man has formed in you.

TREASURED MEMORIES

Theresa Panzica

I remember 57th Street beach
and 43rd Street rocks
and grapevines in Monaghan's backyard
and pumpkin pies
and a turkey hanging upside down in Nana's pantry.
I remember pigtails and rags in my hair
and rabbit's feet on key chains
and Mary Jane shoes
and Mary Jane candy
and root beer floats at David's.
I remember swimming at Mark White Square
and volley ball
and pull the peg
and rainbow cones
and Saint David School on Emerald Avenue.
I remember playing roly-poly
and hop-scotch on the street
and "Ole, ole, ocean, free, free, free,
come to goal and you'll be free"
and street lights on.
I remember the iceman, the ice-cream man,
the chichity man,
and the ragman in the alley,
the insurance man, and the block captain.
And World War II.
I remember a wooden doll buggy
and cigars growing from trees
and a two-wheeler to share
and pipe fences to walk with perfect balance.
But most of all, I remember my mother:
her lilting laugh, her soft Irish brogue,
her wonderful skin, and the smell of her.
I remember the clean sweet smell of my mother.
And I remember her beautiful face.
That is my most treasured memory.

THE DAYS I REMEMBER

Lisa Swiderski

Blue is my heart
When I look at you

Red is the passion
We had for each other

Yellow are my thoughts
Of us together

Yellow are the days
I remember

Gray is the line we drew
Between love and friendship

Green are the days
That are passing us by

Orange are the leaves
That have fallen and dried

Blue is the river
Running through my soul

Blue is the hurt
I'll never show

Gray is the line we drew
Blue is when I look at you
But yellow are the days I remember

IS LIFE REALLY A RACE?

Linda Campbell

Do you believe life's a race
we're all recruited to run?
Straining daily to keep up the pace.
quickly denying pleasure or fun.

College tuition, retirement loom ahead.
A few hours overtime, a side job perhaps.
Cash flow's low, checkbook's in the red.
We're nothing but victims of money traps.

Cherish every moment as each day has to end,
and be thankful for blessings and gifts that are free,
like newborn babies and the love of a friend
because life isn't a race, but a time to just BE.

Treasure each day you allow yourself to play,
and may love and laughter brighten your way.

GRANDMA'S ADVICE

Lisa Acosta

Turn off that television,
child, and listen to me:
Do you think youth lasts forever?
Now you are playful and free.

Child, you listen to me.
Flowers, they wither and fade.
Now you are playful and free,
but wisdom comes with age.

Flowers, they wither and fade.
The "good times" slip into the past.
Wisdom comes with age,
and age comes far too fast.

The "good times" slip into the past
as worries pile up at your door.
You'll find that age comes far too fast,
and you'll wish for youth once more.

Worries pile up at the door.
Yes, that's what adulthood brings.
You'll wish for youth once more—
though you now long for grown-up things.

That's what adulthood brings,
so go out in fresh air and run.
I know you wish for grown-up things,
but now is the time to have fun.

Go out in fresh air and run.
Go ahead, be playful and free.
Now is the time to have fun,
and won't you please turn off that TV?

UNTITLED

Diana Weathersby

Beautiful lake, elongated tongue lapping the

jagged sharp shore

Boats are idling lazily, hazy hot sun scorching

naked African skin

Guests daintily dip in and out, cooling mossy liquid

soothing anguished souls

Circus performers on balancing sticks, yanked as if

flying neon kites

Danger
Death
Destruction
D
R
O
W
N
I
N
G

glaring up from eighty murky feet.

SILENCE TO THE SONG

Dustin Guest

She tests the grim murky waters' corners,
relishing, relaxing, remembering.
The world is one large muddy black hole in the ground,
hands covered in grim reaching up,
beckoning her to join their hollow bones.
She turns in pain, horror, and disbelief
and feels the power of her fated life.
She loves like the rest and cries and does mourn,
but she must remain calm and cool
even as the world that wraps itself about her shoulders
continues to hurt and scorn her,
ignoring the sounds of her weeping cry.
She slips her foot into the water twice,
slowly moving deeper and deeper.
Her dress becomes heavy and soaked
as she lowers her body into it
kissing the world goodbye.
Ophelia's song has been silenced
for the final time.

FUNERAL

Diana Weathersby

Today was your funeral.
Streams of dress-black people parading through.
Routine to the masked soldiers standing at attention.

Unknown woman mimicking religious chants.
Meaningless to the dazed audience, stupefied by your untimely death.
The children running, laughing, daring to touch your dead stiff hands.
Their uneasiness less to be near you than when you were alive.

Seven dysfunctional children tortured by your choice to give life.
Watching you dissolve in a glass of whiskey and a puff of Marlboro smoke.
Some you left, some left you and few hung on by bloody fingertips;
Like the action hero dangling forty six stories over the edge.

An empty shell, tight lips pulled back in a grimace painted dead pink. Skeleton hands folded nicely in disguise.
None fooled by your mime act.
Vivid memories of stinging slaps, growling bear stomachs.
Searing smoke and stench of flesh are branded in my mind.

MOSAIC: A PRODUCT OF CHOICE: A NEW PEOPLE AND PARADISE FOUND

Dave Mentzer

The end of my earthly being,
the beginning of my eternal soul.
Both have great value to me,
but which one will lead me home?

Finally, a new beginning has arisen.
The earth has faded.
A new Jerusalem has appeared.
Why have we been made new?
The answer is not easily seen.
Why are we allowed in?
Because the ransom is paid,
has been paid in full.
Finally, a new beginning has arisen.

A summer never ending
a leisure always fulfilled
a past never coming
and the skies always blue
a waterful of joy
a feast served as peace
a love so overwhelming
a banquet with the king.

THAILAND
Amy Outland

I learned somewhere that the word Thailand meant freedom.
I thought I knew what that meant,
but now I question its definition.

With each passing day,
I try to break away
from my own intuition.

I'm desperate
to know what
I want from life.

I thought I knew,
but fate has made me lost
in a sea of possibility.

I wonder constantly
if I will ever find
tranquility

within myself or
by the grace and wisdom of another
who has not yet crossed my path?

I ask these questions
but no answers
are revealed.

Uncertainty is at the root
of this fear
that I feel.

So I hope
by my journey's end
that I can mend
broken
fragments
of infinite choices

and listen to the voices
whose only words
are silence

in hope that they guide
me in the right direction
although I know not where they lead.

Is my place indeed buried
in a foreign country
beneath layers of crisp silk and spice?

Until time tells,
the question
must suffice

until the day I have the courage
to swim through the sea of possibility
to greet whatever lies on the other side.

Then someday
I just might find
my own Thailand.

THE VIEW FROM ACROSS THE HALL

Bill Yarrow

As I look through the collected poetry of Ted Thompson, my colleague in the English/Foreign Language Department for the last ten years (Ted's been here much longer than I have—he started in 1967 and is retiring in 2003 after thirty six years at JJC), I see four different moods of Ted the poet. There's the satiric/cynical/sarcastic mood in which Ted takes sight of and skewers the social, political (especially political), and educational follies of our time. The cleverness and humor of these poems don't lessen at all the poems' seriousness. There's the aesthetic, self-critical mood in which Ted contemplates poetry, lovingly mocks it, and often finds it wanting. There's the philosophic mood in which something observed in the world sets Ted a-thinkin' and moves him to generalization. Lastly, there's the personal mood (he wouldn't call it that or even admit it) wherein Ted confronts his forebears and his past and something lovely, I won't call it nostalgia, emerges.

When Ted comes across the hall with poem, hot from the printer, in hand, I'm always excited to read his work, see which mood he's in, see which idea or event has excited his imagination, see in what way his intelligence and wit have manifested themselves. Ted and I have been recent co-editors of WORDEATER but we are co-editors of each other's work as well. He shows me his poems and I show him mine—for critique and suggestions but most of all for response. It's important for a poet to have diligent and sensitive readers and I appreciate Ted's thoughtful and reasonable reactions to my work. That's why I'm so glad Ted searched through his Sargasso Sea of an office and put together a sizeable sheathe of poems from which I've chosen this selection. I'm pleased to be able to present these poems in this issue of WORDEATER as a tribute to Ted Thompson, poet and force for poetry at JJC. I'll miss you across the hall, Ted. WORDEATER readers will miss your incisive wit and uncompromising outrage.

Here follow poems of four moods by Ted Thompson.

HABIT

The rubber band
dangles on my wrist.
Unconscious habit,
foolish looking,
but, I wonder,
are habits hereditary?
My father never
threw a rubber band away.
They graced his gearshift
three and four at once.
His wrist was wrapped
in rubber.
Government issue.
This perhaps
explains
why he kept them all.
Not to prevent
waste.
He saw too much of that
to think
some rubber band would help.
More likely,
to avoid
the red tape needed
to get replacements.
At any rate,
they dangled
through my childhood
from his wrist.
Now
they form
an elastic loop in time
that would fit
quite nicely
around Swann's wrist,
a very chewy
madeleine.

CHICAGO JAZZ FEST 2002

The spider launches into air
adrift on a filament of silk
dangling until it finds foundation.

Launching out again and again,
it weaves its snaring tapestry
to feed itself, oblivious to my enjoyment

and oblivious to another web
woven on the night air but
thirty yards (a continent?) away

on stage where the jazz pianist
launched his silky solo on a filament
of sound, dangling note after note

riding on the bass foundation
weaving harmonious tapestry
on the warp of rhythm

feeding his inner need, still
striving for my enjoyment
but oblivious to his fellow artist

swinging from the back of the chair
in front of me—so my attention
was a divided groove.

ADVICE

Until
the day he died,
my father
was cursed with cognizance.

Lung cancer
intensified
his zest
for the life
he felt ebbing away.

Once
sitting at table,
unable to eat,
he stared at me
and said,

"Take your family
on a picnic—
eat hot dogs and
watermelon
until you
puke."

CAFÉ

Gay umbrellas block the sun.
They sit there nonchalant,
cups and glasses
haphazard on the
tiny tops of tables
gazing at the boulevard.
Things of beauty
with hearts
empty as Orphan Annie's eyes

AN EXPLORATION

"I taste a liquor never brewed"
Emily Dickinson

At the bottom of the hill,
brooding over the nest
of broken urban eggs
that had been in its neighborhood
loomed the bankrupt brewery.

I passed the gate
now sagging open
from rusted-through hinges
and picked my way
through tangled lines,
schizophrenic piping,
the debris of failure.

I wandered past
bloated empty vats,
huge copper cauldrons
holding nothing but dust,
and in the bottling room
nothing but dust
flowed into those bottles
still waiting in line to be filled,
ironic labels proclaiming,
"Freshly brewed!"

Then I saw in a bottle's glass
my distorted reflection
and I shared
its emptiness.

ASSIGNATIONS AND ASSASSINATIONS

Assignations and assassinations
can hardly be told apart.
Instead of a crew,
they each take just two
and both of them go for the heart.

A NEST OF SHADOWS

Overhead the hawk hovered
between the sun and me.

I stepped in his angel shadow
but only put on his darkness.

That's the way it is,
walking in another's shadow.

Preferring baseball caps
and communal shade,

we find bare heads and
open skies anachronistic.

The comfortable shadows beckon.
The hawk flies on—alone.

AMERICA'S NEWEST PROFESSION

Seduced by gadgets
and minor petroleum comforts
from slick corporate pimps,
lamenting lost virtue
but contemptuous of the johns,
America trolls the global streets
in her fishnet bellicosity
and push-up patriotism
hunting the sweatshop trick.

THE FRENCH HAVE A WORD FOR IT

Americans
misunderstand French.
So often
we mistake,
in our leaders and heroes,
sang-froid
for savoir-faire.

TO A PATRON A LA SHAKESPEARE

The way it goes in academia
would give a happy whale bulimia;

and politics is even seamia
enough to turn my stomach squeamia

but then, like Will, I get a dreamiya
and everything is fine.

THE GAME, AS IT IS PLAYED

She despised him
but stayed
because of the children.
It was his fault.
He had made the deal,
not her.
So when it went sour
and they had to move
to this god-forsaken place,
it was just another example
of his self-centeredness.
And he expected her
to endure this through
thick and thin?
Boy, he's got
another think a-comin.
If it weren't for the boys,
she'd have been out of here
long ago.
All she ever did
was work work work.
Meals to fix.
Tending the kids.
Cleaning.
Did he even notice?
Sure he worked hard in the fields,
but you'd think he'd be
more appreciative.
That noise at the door
must be the old jerk now.
I suppose he'll want dinner.
She looked up from her
Sewing as he called,
"Eve, honey, I'm home."

THE OLD SHELL GAME

Presently printable poetry
must sound
in staccato burps
images
in wampum strings—
the beady shells of poems.

Profound pearls
to prideful maker,
but certainly
no chambered nautilus.

Just a flotsam of phrases
to readers
still betting on the ace of meaning
in poetry's incessant
three-card monte.

A POET IS

A poet is
a master of musical rhyme
and rhythms that lyrically shine.

A poet is
a forger of stainless phrases
unrusted despite critics' praises.

A poet is
a teller of romantic fiction
in esoteric but elegant diction.

A poet is
a spewer of personal pratter
that only to him can matter.

A poet is
an ego as large as a barge
if a barge is ever that large.

THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING

Fledglings of flightless birds
flock into the classroom.

Mouths agape,
unable to self-feed,
they await some
tidbit
and yawp loudly
if the wait to them is long.

Dreaming of
egg days,
nurtured on their
fathers' feet,
they leave
as hungry as they entered.

The economy
like some great raptor
will feed
long on their livers.

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

We know the darkness
by the fact that we don't see
while we know the light
as visual acuity.

But where does each of these
fade off into the other?
What shade of dusky gloaming
becomes the darker brother?

Rousing from a sleep,
we call this dimness light,
but entering from the noon
it masks with murky might.

Between the dark and light,
our selves create the line.
We don't leave that distinction
for others to define.

Just so for those abstractions
light-dark can represent.
If we don't see our darkling selves,
we never shall repent.

A GRAY ELEGY

The gray, moist invitation
of the jumbled rocks below;
The call of mass and hard duration
amidst the river's flow.

She touched my arm to draw me back;
"You seem so self-absorbed," said she.
I tried to focus, to get on track,
but her words shot clear through me.

To lose this vain and fretful mind,
all concerns transformed away
into a cool, crystalline kind—
self-absorbed into mass of gray.

THE SULLEN ART

Unlike the painter
who directly spikes the eye,
we use black squiggles
to excite the brain
and hit the vision retrograde.
The word is a woeful instrument.

Midnight murders the message.
Where is the resuscitating metaphor?
But the mind
is a mine of firedamp.
finding the spark explodes it all.
The word is a woeful instrument.

Swollen with desire,
I waddle to the stirrups,
but what comes aborning
has mutated far
from the seed of intention.
The word is a woeful instrument.

Language
is but the flicker
of shadows
on the cold stone wall
of the lonesome cave.
The word is a woeful instrument.

ELDORADOS ARE SO DECLASSE
(Apologies to Edgar Allan Poe)

Gaily beclad
a gallant lad
in need to please the ladies
worked under the lash
and saved his cash
to buy a new Mercedes.

But he grew old,
this lad so bold,
and never pleased the ladies
for he never had
enough of a wad
to buy a new Mercedes.

As dreams did fade,
he met a maid
who wanted to be a lady.
"Girlie," said he,
"why must it be,
this need for a new Mercedes?"

"Over the mountains
of the moon
are the only willing ladies
who'll ride, boldly ride,"
the maid replied,
"If you don't have a Mercedes."

WAR PRAYER 1991

May the technofire
not work too well,
not keep this war too clean.
May this war be bloody and horrid.
May the bodies stack
high on the horizon
that we may learn the real accounting.

We fear a generation
who see glory
in the swagger of slim young pilots,
in the cocksuredness of mindless Marines,
who tie yellow ribbons around
"Dulce et decorum est"
and in most self-righteous tone
send off more cocksure swaggering
sons and daughters
"pro patria mori."

May we not have as model
the much-too-easy war.
May the rockets' red glare
not become
the smug quick fix
for decades of disagreement.
When reason fails,
as reason must,
may we not come
to count on war.

JOCASTA'S SUICIDE

Bill Yarrow

(for Ted Thompson)

She hanged herself out of shame.
She couldn't bear the thought of
what she had done. She couldn't
endure the cold eyes of society,
the hot condemnation of her peers.

Today, she'd book an appearance on
Sally Jesse or Maury Povich,
be reconciled with her blind son
and shared children. Not to worry,
Jocasta, the crowd's on your side.

I wish there was more shame in the world.
Have we forgotten how to be ashamed?
Don't we understand what shame is for?
No room for shame today in our world.
Room only for shameless or recovering Jocastas.

Wordeater is the biannual literary/arts magazine of Joliet Junior College.

It accepts submissions from current and former students and faculty.

It is looking for original creative work of any kind, including poetry, plays, short fiction, translations, personal or literary essays, interviews, autobiographical prose, photography, and art.

Please submit work to W. Yarrow (English/Foreigh Language Department, mailbox C-1050 or in WORD via e-mail to byarrow@jjc.edu)). Put your name, address, and telephone number on an envelope or separate cover, but not on the work itself. Only artwork/photography will be returned. Please include a SASE.

The John Stobart Award for Poetry

1st Place: Morgan Drdak for her poem, *Moderation*

2nd Place: Jeff O'Malley for his poem, *The Lost Revolutionary: A Confession*

3rd Place: Lisa Acosta for her poem, *Grandma's Advice*

4th Place: Marissa L. Frantini for her poem, *How About This?*

First, second, third and fourth place monetary awards for poetry are given for student work judged the best in the current issue by an outside judge.

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*John Stobart was the founder and guiding light of **Wordeater**. As faculty sponsor, he shepherded it through 106 issues. He retired from Joliet Junior College's English/Foreign Language Department in 1999.

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